



State of South Carolina
Office of The Lieutenant Governor

André Bauer
Lieutenant Governor

Office on Aging
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**Lt. Governor André Bauer Welcomes
Top Medicare Official to South Carolina**

(Chapin, S.C. -) Over 100 seniors in this small midlands community braved falling temperatures and intermittent rain Friday morning to hear from state and federal leaders involved in bringing the new Medicare prescription drug benefit to South Carolina.

Lt. Governor André Bauer, head of the state Office on Aging, welcomed the Bush administration's top Medicare official, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Dr. Mark McClellan, to a packed house at the Generations of Chapin Assisted Living facility. The I-CARE (Insurance Counseling Assistance and Referral for Elders) program run by the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging has been at the forefront of South Carolina's efforts to educate people about the new drug benefit.

"We're honored that Dr. McClellan would come and visit us again here in South Carolina," said Bauer.

This is McClellan's second visit to South Carolina to promote the new benefit, which has many seniors and their families across the country grappling with working through the various plans and cost options offered by the private insurance companies approved by Medicare to provide the drug coverage. McClellan praised the efforts of I-CARE counselors and other groups that have been involved in providing education and outreach efforts to help people get enrolled in a drug plan.

"As the Lt. Governor mentioned, I've been here with him before," said McClellan. "His leadership in the Office on Aging has made a real difference in this process."

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That process involves reaching out to the more than 600,000 people in South Carolina who are eligible for Medicare and making sure each one is aware of the benefit and helping them make a decision about whether or not to enroll, and if so, which of the more than five dozen plan offerings available is the right one for them. According to McClellan, while those numerous plans may have made the process of enrolling a little more challenging, competition between the insurance companies offering the plans has also helped hold down the cost to beneficiaries, and to US taxpayers.

"The cost of the coverage is going to be a lot less than anticipated because of the number of options available," said McClellan. "Seniors can typically save 50% or more on the prescription drugs that they take."

For low-income Medicare beneficiaries eligible for the extra assistance available from Social Security or through the state GAPS program administered by the SC Department of Health and Human Services, the plans will be even more affordable.

"Too many people in this country have been struggling for too long to pay for prescription drugs," said Dr. McClellan, and the new benefit aims to change that.

After his speech, Dr. McClellan opened the meeting up to questions from the audience, and I-CARE counselors were available afterwards to help attendees compare plans based on their individual circumstances. The enrollment event was just one of more than 1,100 similar events that have taken place all around the state during the past several months, where people eligible for the drug benefit or their families have been able to get education, information and on-on-one counseling to help with the enrollment process. People interested in scheduling or attending such an event in their local community should contact the I-CARE counseling program at their local Area Agency on Aging, or the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging in Columbia at 1-800-868-9095.

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